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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000491

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SCUL](#) [PGOV](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS ADEN

1. (U) Summary: Ambassador visited Aden, the financial capital of Yemen, March 9 to 10 to check on several U.S. government sponsored projects and to carry the public diplomacy message that, Yemeni interests are well served by a strong relationship with the U.S. regardless of Iraq. Locally based media were with the Ambassador at each stop and provided wide and positive coverage to the visit. Many Yemeni media and other contacts have commented to us favorably this week on the fact that the U.S. Embassy has not drawn down its staff and remains positively, and publicly, engaged in promoting development and bilateral cooperation.

2. (U) Visit with the Governor of Aden: On his arrival on the morning of Sunday, March 9, the Ambassador drove directly from the airport to the Governor's office to begin his very busy day of visits. In a half-hour conversation, the two covered a variety of topics, including economic and social development, security at the Port of Aden, the U.S. assisted development of the Yemeni Coast Guard, the upcoming parliamentary elections in April and the participation of women in the process and other issues. The Governor thanked the Ambassador for the U.S. interest in and assistance to Aden.

3. (U) Opening of the Computer Center at the Yemen Women's Association: The Ambassador then moved on to the Aden center of the Yemen Women's Association to officially open their new computer center which was financed with a grant from the Public Diplomacy Section of the U.S. Embassy. The computer center now has ten state-of-the-art computers with networking capability and has become a busy place training women in computer skills. Embassy Sanaa's Information Resource Director Helmi Noman provided technical help in helping set up the computer center as well as trained the staff as trainers. The Ambassador was briefed on the work of the Association and visited the organization's three-year pre-school facility for the children of working mothers. The children entertained the Ambassador and his entourage with recitations and songs.

4. (U) Visit to the School Desk Factory: The Ambassadorial motorcade then moved on to the General Establishment for Furniture and School Equipment, where 150 thousand school desks are being manufactured for schools all over Yemen financed through 416(b) funds (\$5.4m). Each desk bears the Embassy's Gamariyya (traditional Yemeni motif incorporating the American flag) that has become a highly visible symbol of U.S.-Yemeni development cooperation. Director Fadhel Saleh Al-Hilali led a tour of the factory to show the various stages of the production. The Ambassador walked by the desks at various states of completion sometimes piled as high as the ceiling. The next day, newspapers carried photographs of the Ambassador standing next to those mountains of desks as well as trucks laden with the desks destined for various regions of the country.

5. (U) Visit to Al-Ayyam Newspaper: The Ambassador then visited the editorial offices of the largest selling newspaper in the country, the privately-owned independent Al-Ayyam to meet with the publisher and the Editor-in-Chief and to give a wide-ranging interview. The interview, which was published in full in the Tuesday, March 11 issue of the newspaper, covered topics under security and development in Yemen, as well as the Iraq and Palestine. Following the meeting, the Ambassador and his entourage were hosted for lunch by the publisher and owner of the newspaper, Hisham Bashraheel. (Complete translated text of the Ambassador's interview sent septel).

6. (U) Visit to the College of Light School for the Blind: The Ambassador's last visit for the day was to the College of Light School for the Blind which was renovated and equipped with a grant of more than \$130 thousand from 416(b) funds. The Ambassador received a briefing on the work of the School and visited some classrooms where he chatted with students.

7. (U) Reception: In the evening, the Ambassador hosted a reception for Mission contacts in Aden at the Sheraton Gold Mohur Hotel located at the center of the picturesque Elephant Bay. More than 65 people, representing government, business, NGOs, the Yemeni Coast Guard, the foreign consular corps and the media were present at the gathering. The Governor of Aden, Taha Ahmed Ghanem, came with his entourage and stayed for a long time, conversing with the Ambassador and others.

18. (U) Visit to the Coast Guard Facilities: On Monday, March 10, the Ambassador visited the sites of the Coast Guard operations and training bases. Captain Robert Innes, the U.S. maritime advisor to the ROYG, guided the tour. First, from the watchtower hill in the city, the Ambassador got a panoramic view of the proposed operations base. Later, he visited the proposed operations base and then took a long tour of the training base which is located some distance from the former.

19. (U) Visit to the Aden Community College: The Ambassador's last visit was to the Aden Community College, a three-year American-style vocational-technical school which was established about three years ago and is scheduled to produce its first graduates this May. The College is trying to maintain a flexible profile in providing graduates with practical skills which are needed in the actual job market. The Public Diplomacy Section of the Embassy has been assisting the College by providing books and providing computer training. PD Sanaa has also requested an English Teaching Fellow for the College. The College administration hosted a lunch for the Ambassadorial group following the briefing.

10. (U) Comment: One of the main purposes of the trip was to promote the public diplomacy aims of creating a positive image for the Mission in Aden in particular and in Yemen in general during a tense period in the region. The media coverage of the visit was wide and very positive. The most prominent Aden daily, &Al-Ayyam8 reported that they sold additional copies during the first day of coverage and some key selling points sold out copies of the newspaper the day the Ambassador's interview appeared. During the well-attended reception at the end of the first day both American officers and FSNs were told by many local attendees that while other foreign missions were leaving Yemen, it was refreshing and reassuring that the U.S. Mission was not only staying on, but remained actively and publicly engaged in promoting development programs and bilateral cooperation.

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